



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## DISCUSSION

---

### WHAT ARE HIGH-SCHOOL PUPILS READING?

---

MILNOR DOREY

English Department, Trenton, N. J.

---

This article does not propose to suggest a course of reading for high-school pupils: the woods are full of them. It does propose to argue that the younger generation is not on "the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire" as a result of its own selective reading.

Not long ago, in the above high school, the pupils of the second- and third-year classes were asked to hand in the names of six books which they enjoyed reading, such books to represent six different authors. The first-year class was not asked to do this because it was assumed that they had just been weaned away from the *Wonder-Book*, *The Psalm of Life*, and the *Jungle Book*, and that their experience as high-school pupils had not yet taught them to deviate from the straight and narrow way. The seniors were not asked because it was tacitly understood that all would immediately exhibit a preference for Burke, Milton, or Macaulay, uniformly agreeing on Shakspeare as "Daily Food."

These are the facts: In the second-year class, numbering 175, 2 per cent. named the *Pansy* books, *John Halifax*, *Gentleman*, *Raffles*, *Red Rock*, Owen Wister, Seton-Thompson, *Donovan*, Major, *The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come*, Eggleston, *David Harum*, *Eben Holden*, *Hugh Wynne*, Stoddard, Aesop's *Fables*, Stanley Weyman, Wells, and some of the later novels. Strangely enough, one named the *Iliad*, another, Hood's poems, Victor Hugo, and, *mirabile dictu*, the works of Mrs. Ward and John Ruskin! But one named Jules Verne, *The Last Days of Pompeii*, and Mark Twain.

Five per cent. named McCutcheon, Marion Crawford, Paul Lester Ford, Marie Corelli, *Mrs. Wiggs*, Dumas, Conan Doyle, the Henty, Blanchard, Hildegarde, Castlemon and Elsie series, Hall Caine, Frank Stockton, *Hope Loring*, *Lorna Doone*, Davis, Otis and Oliver Optic. Two pupils named *Gulliver's Travels*, Bryant, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, E. P. Roe, Field, and Riley, and only two, Captain King and Mary Mapes Dodge. Ten per cent. named *Tom Brown's School Days*, Horatio Alger, Tennyson's *The Princess*, Kate Douglas Wiggin, Lowell, *The Lamplighter*, Bunyan, Eliot, Defoe, *The Swiss Family Robinson*, Cooper, Charles Lamb, and (praise be!) Franklin's *Autobiography*.

Fifteen per cent. named *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Churchill, *The Man With-*

out a Country, Washington Irving, Stevenson, and Whittier. Twenty per cent. named *Ben Hur*, Dr. Holmes, Rose Carey, *Silas Marner*, and Hawthorne. Twenty-five per cent. name *Ivanhoe*; 40 per cent. Dickens and Shakspeare; and 50 per cent., Longfellow.

In a case where only the author is mentioned, all of, or at least his most popular, works are implied, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Elsie Vennor*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *The Sketch Book*, *Sherlock Holmes*, *The Christian*, *Treasure Island*, *The Tale of Two Cities*, *David Copperfield*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, etc., leading. In regard to poems, "Thanatopsis," "Snow Bound," "Evangeline," "Voices of the Night," "One Hoss Shay," and "The Courtin'," led the way.

In the third-year class, numbering 150, 20 per cent., named Hawthorne, Bryant, Thackeray, Stevenson, Poe, Tennyson, Hugo, Franklin, Burns, Whittier, Riley, Irving, Dr. VanDyke, *Ben Hur*, Owen Wister, Mrs. Wiggs, the *Elsie* books, Rose Carey, *Donovan*, *The Lamplighter*, *Lorna Doone*, *The Clansman*, *Janice Meredith*, Amelia Barr, H. H. Jackson, Mary J. Holmes (!), *Dorothy Vernon*, *The Christian*, Margaret Deland, Page, Mrs. Wiggins, Oliver Optic, *Black Rock*, *The Pit*, Mrs. Ward, *Tom Brown's School Days*, Marie Corelli, *The Ancient Mariner*, Louise Alcott, E. P. Roe, *Quo Vadis*, *The Lady or the Tiger*, *When Knighthood Was in Flower*, *Last Days of Pompeii*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *To Have and to Hold*, the Henty and Alger books, *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*, and again, *mirabile dictu*, Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, and Browning!

Five per cent. named McCutcheon, Crawford, Conan Doyle, Churchill, Dr. Hale, and Cooper, and many had at least one of the most recent novels on their list; but fully 25 to 50 per cent. named Lowell, Dickens, Holmes, Eliot, Scott, Longfellow, and Shakspeare. In this class there was a more mature selection of the plays of Shakspeare, a wider acquaintance with Longfellow, Scott, Dickens, and Eliot, and an apparent preference for the more analytical novels and poems. *Romola*, *Oliver Twist*, the *Bigelow Papers*, *Kenilworth*, *Outre Mer*, *The Tales of a Wayside Inn*, *Prue and I*, etc., were noticeable.

While it is obvious that the gradation of choice for classic over popular works exists in the second and not in the third year, yet it can be safely said that three-fourths of the combined class prefer "standard" authors.

What is the significance of this? Surely not the fact that our pupils' reading is in a deplorable state. True enough, a certain allowance must be made for those who made out their lists as they did because they had read no others; for those who named only "standard" writers in order to please their teachers, or because they were studied in class; for those who because of outside employment or home environment made incomplete or cheap lists; and for those who may have read none of the books indicated. But in this experiment the writer believes that the number of these cases is small. Other

schools may have other results, although it is safe to say that the school in question is fairly representative in this matter.

It will be noticed that biography, essays, history, and works of science were not asked for, the purpose being primarily to find out what sort of fiction was preferred. The poetry was for the most part voluntary. As was to be expected, the younger boys largely chose books of adventure, and the younger girls, the sentimental romances; the more mature pupils of both sexes leaned toward the wholesomeness of Stevenson, the simplicity and good cheer of Longfellow, the wisdom of Shakspeare, and the humor of Holmes. In many cases most of the works of a novelist were given and an order of preference was stated; many chose to indicate certain poems rather than give merely the name of the writer.

Nevertheless, there is much missionary work to be done, despite the encouragement taken from the experiment. It is a very joyful, profitable experience to size up your boy or girl, and when, as a matter of course (or duty?), you have directed him or her to Hawthorne, or Emerson, or Eliot, or Shakspeare, you should then give them J. M. Barrie, or James Lane Allen, or Mrs. Deland, or Hamlin Garland, Bret Harte, Goethe, Kingsley, Charles Reade, Mary Wilkins, Paul Heyse, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, *A Boy's Town*, La Motte-Fouque, Miss Gilder, some sound biographies, Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*, Froissart—well, you know the list. However, it must be said that these lists were compiled previous to any missionary work; the missionary work in certain quarters was done when the information came in. As a result, book reviews or estimates four times a year are required of the pupils, of books recommended or approved by the teachers, and in this way a tab is kept on the pupil's reading apart from the regular English work and its requisite outside list.

After all, the questions may arise: If this is a universal case, how much of it is really due to the pupil's selective taste, the teacher's, home environment, the signs of the times, or the present course of study—notably the "College Entrance Requirements"? By the way, out of the forty books in the six groups indicated by this committee, twenty-six were chosen by these pupils without any knowledge of such a list. Might it not be wise for the committee to make out its recommendations from the pupils' lists? Let us not yet hold up our hands in horror at the huge number of embryo "Diamond Dicks"—it is not so formidable. As to the above questions, "that is another story."